Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition

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If the ongoing upazila elections are taken as the barometer to evaluate the popularity of the country's political parties, Jatiya Party, the main opposition in the parliament, has been mercilessly rejected by the voters. The party backed-candidates were able to win only two out of 209 chairmen posts in the elections held so far. Even the United People's Democratic Force (UPDF), a regional political party in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, has fared better than the "main opposition". Candidates blessed by the UPDF have won three chairmen posts.

The northern districts--Rangpur, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Thakurgaon, Kurigram, and Gaibandha-- were considered to be the bastions of the JP, which is led by former military dictator HM Ershad. In the previous parliamentary elections held over the last two decades, JP candidates always fared well in these districts. But the upazila election results tell us that JP's bastion has been successfully conquered by other parties. Its contenders won chairman posts only in Kishoreganj upazila in Nilphamari and Shahaghata upazila in Gaibandha, though elections were held in 18 upazilas in the six northern districts.

The situation in Rangpur, Ershad, is even worse. Ershad's supporters have performed badly there. His party blessed candidate faced a humiliating defeat to Jamaat-e-Islami supported candidate in Mithapukur upazila in Rangpur. The Jamaat man won the chairman post by bagging 1.17 lakh votes while the JP blessed candidate was able to secure only 8,941 votes. In Badarganj upazila in this district, ruling Awami League-backed candidate won the chairman post securing 39,611 votes while the JP contender was able to bag only 11,046 votes.

Why did voters punish JP so harshly? The JP leaders in the northern districts should have an answer. According to them, Ershad' shifting stances over taking part in the January 5 controversial parliamentary election has damaged the JP's credibility. Disappointed, many local JP leaders and supporters had even joined the AL and the BNP, which was also a reason for its poor results. Organisational weaknesses has also contributed to the party-backed candidates' defeat, they say, adding that in some cases, JP men even worked for



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